



## The Superior Individual and the Willing Slave – Richard Taylor on Restoring Pride

“The themes of this book result from years of observing people in my effort to understand why their lives take the directions they do. Some of these people have been men and women of great creative achievement while most, of course, have not...What is it, then, that sets the former part? The answer is, in short, that they invent their own lives, while the others fall into the lockstep of custom, thereby letting society more or less choose their lives for them. This latter approach to life I call “willing slavery.””

[\*Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride\*](#)

In 1995, the late American philosophy professor and bee-keeper Richard Taylor penned *Restoring Pride*, which to this day, remains perhaps the greatest and most underappreciated “self-help” book. The premise of Taylor’s book is, in his words, “the fact that some people are better as human beings than others.” In our age of egalitarian envy, this elitist mindset may sound like treason, but as Taylor points out:

“Everyone knows this is true, and while it may be good social policy to pretend otherwise, much is also lost.”

[\*Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride\*](#)

Taylor’s sublime book is currently out of print and increasingly difficult to find. For those unable to secure it, in this article we are going to provide a summary of some of Taylor’s key passages and ideas.

### The Superior Human Being

What is a superior human being? Superior human beings differ among each other in a myriad of ways. However, the one virtue they all share in common is personal excellence. At some point in life, the superior human being discovers that he or she possesses an natural inclination for a subject,

skill, vocation, or profession, and from that point on, dedicates his or her life to the cultivation of personal excellence in that field.

“Thus the proud rise above ordinary people, and are quite literally superior to them; but their superiority rests not on class, power, or wealth, but on being gifted in some way and then applying those gifts to personal achievement.”

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

## **The Reward of Personal Excellence – Pride and Authentic Self-Love**

Personal excellence is difficult to achieve as it requires creativity, persistence, and years of hard work and practice. So clearly there must be worthwhile rewards bestowed upon those who attain it. What are the rewards associated with personal excellence?

Some superior human beings attain fame; some accumulate a little, or a lot, of money. However, other superior human beings remain unknown for their entire lives and may not even make a penny from their efforts. But while the rewards of recognition or wealth are nice if attained, such rewards are trivial in comparison with the one reward that all superior human beings are guaranteed: that is, pride and the self-love that accompanies the knowledge that one has done, and is continually doing, something significant and meaningful with their life.

“The reward of personal excellence is not fame, but pride. You are proud, not because of the applause of others, or even the applause of the whole world, but because of what you genuinely are – provided, of course, that you are gifted in some significant way and that you do something with that gift.”

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

Merely to do what others have done is often safe, and comfortable; but to do something truly original, and do it well, whether it is appreciated by others or not – that is what being human is really all about, and it is what alone justifies the self-love that is pride.

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

“Personal excellence, therefore, requires no recognition, no authentication by others. More than this, it need not even be recognizable; that is, a person’s worth often rests upon some strength or ability which the world might not recognize as of much value even when clearly displayed. Genius, even great genius, can be in small things, and things that most persons might regard as even insignificant. What is required for personal excellence is that its possessor be able to do something with extraordinary skill. It need not be some great or dramatic thing.”

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

## **The Inferior Human Being – The Willing Slave**

If personal excellence and pride are the mark of the superior human being, then unquestioned conformity to social norms and customs is the mark of the inferior human being, whom Richard Taylor called the “willing slave”.

“What is it, then, that sets the [superior human being] apart? The answer is, in short, that they invent their own lives, while the others fall into the lockstep of custom, thereby letting society more or less choose their lives for them. This latter approach to life I call “willing slavery.””

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

“Indeed, to the extent that your actions and pursuits are your responses to the will and the approval of other people, you are the very opposite of a proud person, for you are the slave of others. A willing slave, to be sure – but a slave, still.”

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

“Slaves, even willing slaves, have no place on those paths that can lead to great and sometimes lasting achievement, for the paths themselves are the creations of those who have forged them. To the extent that you embark upon a path handed to you ready-made, you have excluded from yourself, however praiseworthy you may be in the eyes of those who have led you that way, any possibility of achieving an excellence that can be called your own. And this means that you have forfeited any chance for personal excellence. You will have to derive your satisfactions from the applause of others, and this may – indeed, probably will – lead you to applaud yourself, though you really have no right to do so...Epictetus was right: if you say “Master!” from the heart and with feeling – which today would mean, if you kneel, bow, or defer even to someone of immense stature and power – then you are slave even though, perhaps, a rich and blessed slave. Freedom is measured not by what you own, and not by any visible glory that you can claim, but solely by your heeding your own will with respect to what is important to you.”

[Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride](#)

## **To be a Superior Human Being, or to be a Willing Slave? That is the Question.**

As Nietzsche pointed out, no matter how tempting it is to play the role of the victim, ultimately we must take into account that we have but a brief flicker of time on this earth, and what we choose to do with it, is our responsibility alone.

“There is the inexplicable factor that we live precisely today, when we had infinite time during which to come into existence, that we possess only a brief today during which to show why and to what end we have come into existence precisely now. We are responsible to ourselves for our own existence. One has to take a rather bold and dangerous line with it – especially since, in the best as in the worst cases, we are bound to lose it.”

[Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations](#)

Given that we are responsible for our own existence, how are we going to spend our time. Are we going to spend it as a willing slave, and blindly follow social norms and customs all the while weaving excuses and self-deceptions to save us from the realization that we are wasting our talents and life? Or are we going to grab hold of the reins of our existence and pursue personal excellence, with the goal of joining the ranks of the superior human beings – the rightfully proud?

Richard Taylor became a superior human being through the cultivation of excellence in the fields of philosophy and bee-keeping. In which domains will you choose to pursue personal excellence?

When we think of creativity, we are apt to construe it narrowly as the creation of things, sometimes even limiting it to things belonging to the arts. But this is arbitrary. Creative intelligence is exhibited by a dancer, by athletes, by a chess player, and indeed in virtually any activity guided by intelligence. In some respects the very paradigm of creative activity is the establishment of a brilliant position in the game of chess, even though what is created is of limited worth. Nor do such activities need to be the kind normally thought of as intellectual. For example, the exercise of skill in a profession, or in business, or even in such things as gardening and farming, or the rearing of a beautiful family, are all displays of creative intelligence. They can be done badly or well and are always done best when not by rule, rote, or imitation but with successful originality. Nor is it hard to see that, in referring to such commonplace activities as these, at the same time we touch upon some of the greatest and most lasting sources of human happiness....

Even the least creative among us are usually capable of something original, however innocuous it might be. But what is sad is the kind of happiness that is within the reach only of human beings should be attained by so few of them. And what is sadder still is that those who have no clear idea of what happiness is, or worse, themselves lack the resources to capture it, do not care. It is, in some ways, almost as if they had not ever been born.

*Richard Taylor, Restoring Pride*